

BRYANT HOUSE AT BEMENT.  
BEMENT, ILLINOIS . . .  
PIATT Co.

HABS. NO. ILL.-223  
HABS  
ILL,  
74-BEM,  
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*Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings*

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
DISTRICT NO. ILL:2

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
- EDGAR E. LUNDEEN - DISTRICT OFFICER -  
CORN BELT BANK BUILDING - BLOOMINGTON ILL.

"BRYANT HOUSE AT BEMENT" (Residence)  
Bement, Piatt County, Illinois

Custodian. Mrs. J. F. Sprague. Mr. Sprague was  
the grandson of Mr. Bryant.

Date Of Erection. 1856.

Architect. None.

Builder. Aaron Yost.

Present Condition. The building is well preserved  
and very much the same as originally built. At one time,  
it was moved one block to the west but has since been  
returned to its original site. There is some question  
as to its being on the original foundation.

Number Of Stories. One.

Materials Of Construction. The foundations are of  
brick; the framing, floors, interior, and exterior walls  
are of wood. The roof is wood shingles.

Other Existing Records. Pamphlet published in  
1925 and given out by Mr. Sprague. 'In the Lincoln  
Country' by Rexford Newcomb--1928.

Additional Data. With the repeal of the Missouri  
Compromise, Abraham Lincoln renewed his interest in

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politics and entered the race for the Senatorship against Stephen A. Douglas in 1858.

"On June 17, 1858, the Republican State Convention nominated Lincoln as candidate for the senatorship and in response Mr. Lincoln delivered his famous 'house divided against itself' speech. This speech defined Lincoln's stand and placed his doctrine in sharp contrast to that of Judge Douglas. On July 9, Douglas spoke at the Tremont House in Chicago and Mr. Lincoln was present to hear him. The next day Lincoln spoke in the same place but Senator Douglas did not attend. On the sixteenth Mr. Douglas spoke at Bloomington and Lincoln went thither to hear him. On July 17 both spoke at Springfield, Douglas in the afternoon, Lincoln in the evening. Neither heard the other. All this time, however, the country lawyer was making a detailed study of the methods and arguments of the wily politician.

"The issue between them came to a definite head when, on July 24, Mr. Lincoln, then at the Tremont House in Chicago, sent to Mr. Douglas a formal challenge to cover the state together in a joint debate. After a meeting

at Bement in Piatt County, Senator Douglas wrote Lincoln the final terms of the encounter as follows:

Dear Sir:--Your letter dated yesterday, accepting my proposition for a joint discussion at one prominent point in each Congressional District, as stated in my previous letter, was received this morning.

The times and places designated are as follows:

Ottawa, LaSalle County. . .	August	21st, 1858
Freeport, Stephenson County	"	27th, 1858
Jonesboro, Union County . .	September	15th, 1858
Charleston, Coles County. .	"	18th, 1858
Galesburg, Knox County. . .	October	7th, 1858
Quincy, Adams County. . . .	"	13th, 1858
Alton, Madison County . . .	"	15th, 1858

I agree to your suggestion that we shall alternately open and close the discussion. I will speak at Ottawa one hour, you can reply, occupying an hour and a half, and I will follow for half an hour. At Freeport, you shall open the discussion and speak one hour; I will follow for an hour and a half, and you can then reply for half an hour. We will alternate in like manner in each successive place.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. A. Douglas

Hon. A. Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

"The old house at Bement from which Mr. Douglas wrote the above letter is still standing and is open as a Lincoln-Douglas memorial. This was the home of Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Bryant, cousins of William Cullen Bryant, the author, and pioneer settlers in Illinois. Mr. Bryant was a staunch friend of Douglas and when it was learned that the Senator was to speak at Monticello on July 29, the Bryants invited Mr. and Mrs. Douglas to be their guests while in Piatt County.

"The Douglasses probably arrived at Bement on the Great Western Railroad the evening before. At any rate, on the

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morning of July 29 the Bryants and Douglasses in the Bryant carriage drove to Monticello where the Senator was to speak in the afternoon. At that time Monticello had no railroad. At the conclusion of the meeting the party started back to Bement and, when about a mile south of Monticello, they met Mr. Lincoln on the road. 'After passing the usual time of day,' says Mr. J. F. Sprague, grandson of Mr. Bryant, 'Senator Douglas asked Mr. Lincoln if he had received his letter. Mr. Lincoln replied that he had. Senator Douglas then asked what he thought of it, to which Mr. Lincoln said he thought favorably of it, asking where he might confer with him after his return to Bement. Mr. Lincoln also had a political engagement in Monticello. Grandfather Bryant invited Mr. Lincoln to meet his guest, Senator Douglas, at his home in Bement.' This spot on the road is today marked by the concrete pyramid shown in the photograph.

'When Lincoln returned to Bement he went to the place agreed upon, entering the little parlor where Senator Douglas awaited him, going over in detail for some two hours' the arrangements for the joint debates. The house was on July 29, 1925, donated to the community by Mr. Sprague as a memorial to the two giants who here agreed to hold this, one of the greatest forensic encounters in our history. The little parlor still retains its furniture of 1858."

When Lincoln was assassinated, Mr. Bryant draped the chair which he had used, placed it in a glass case, and, to this day, the chair has been undisturbed.

The house was built in 1856 by Aaron Yost and is today in the custody of Mrs. Sprague.

Reference:

In The Lincoln Country--Rexford Newcomb

(Approved)

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*Edgar E. Gunden*  
District Officer

*Reviewed 1926 by H.C.F.*